

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listing, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) An aqueous composition for use as a stabilizing and texturizing agent in dairy products, said aqueous composition being prepared by a process comprising heating an aqueous mixture comprising:

1.5 to 45 wt.% of whey protein concentrate, calculated as dried product,

1 to 15 wt.% of starch,

0.15 to 6 wt.% of a first hydrocolloid, and

0.03 to 3 wt.% of a second hydrocolloid

to a temperature in the range of 60 to 100°C for a period of 1 to 120 minutes and wherein dairy products containing the aqueous composition can be packaged using a hot-fill process and maintain a smooth texture after the hot-fill process.

2. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 1, wherein the whey protein concentrate is in liquid or powder form.

3. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 1, wherein the starch is selected from one or more of waxy maize starch, corn starch, pea starch, wheat starch and potato starch.

4. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 2, wherein the starch is selected from one or more of waxy maize starch, corn starch, pea starch, wheat starch and potato starch.

5. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 1, wherein the first hydrocolloid is selected from one or more gums and the second hydrocolloid is selected from one or more gel-forming heteropolysaccharides.

6. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 2, wherein the first hydrocolloid is selected from one or more gums and the second hydrocolloid is selected from one or more gel-forming heteropolysaccharides.

7. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 5, wherein the first hydrocolloid is selected from one or more gums and the second hydrocolloid is selected from one or more gel-forming heteropolysaccharides.

8. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 5, wherein the gum is carob bean gum, guar gum, gum arabic, xanthan gum or tara bean gum.

9. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 7, wherein the gel-forming heteropolysaccharide is carrageenan or agar.

10. (Original) The aqueous composition of claim 8, wherein the gel-forming heteropolysaccharide is carrageenan or agar.

11. (Original) The aqueous composition of claims 1, wherein the process is carried out under pressure.

12. (Currently amended) A food composition comprising a dairy product base and an aqueous composition in a ratio, based on the food composition, of 30 to 80 wt.% of the dairy product base and 70 to 20 wt.% of the aqueous composition, wherein the aqueous composition is prepared by a process comprising heating an aqueous mixture comprising:

- 1.5 to 45 wt.% of whey protein concentrate, calculated as dried product,
- 1 to 15 wt.% of starch,
- 0.15 to 6 wt.% of a first hydrocolloid, and
- 0.03 to 3 wt.% of a second hydrocolloid

to a temperature in the range of 60 to 100°C for a period of 1 to 120 minutes and wherein the food composition can be packaged using a hot-fill process and maintain a smooth texture after the hot-fill process.

13. (Original) The food composition of claim 12, wherein the dairy product base is selected from bases for yogurt, sour milk, cream cheese and soft white cheese.

14. (Original) The food composition of claim 12, wherein the dairy product base is a low fat dairy product base.

15. (Original) The food composition of claim 13, wherein the dairy product base is a low fat dairy product base.

16. (Original) The food composition of claim 12, wherein the dairy product base is a high protein dairy product base.

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17. (Original) The food composition claim 13, wherein the dairy product base is a high protein dairy product base.

18. (Original) The food composition of claim 12, wherein the dairy product base is low fat/high protein soft white cheese base.

19. (Original) The food composition of claim 13, wherein the dairy product base is low fat/high protein soft white cheese base.